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ABSTRACT

This manual presents production guidelines and suggestions for use by commercial, public, and educational broadcast facilities that seek to provide television interpreting for the hearing impaired. Topics covered include a brief overview of the need for television services for this audience and the use of closed captioning and sign language to provide it; how to find a qualified interpreter; types of programs that should be interpreted or can be interpreted successfully, including special events and emergencies, news, entertainment, and commercials; tips for interpreters; local programming, including style of copy, previewing pretaped segments, studio placement, and reverse interpreting; and guidelines for such production considerations as lighting, camera and monitor placement, make-up and dress, and screen placement. (CMV)

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INTERPRETING TELEVISION

FOR HEARING IMPAIRED VIEWERS:

A Guidebook for Producers and Interpreters

National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Instructional Television Department

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TELEVISION AND THE HEARING IMPAIRED VIEWER

Television's potential for shaping a society and uniting a community cannot be denied. With 73 million television households in the United States today, 40 to 58 million people view prime time programs for six hours every day. Television is part of our culture.

Television is a mass medium and as such tends to concentrate on serving the majority of viewers' needs. Increasingly, government agencies and special interest groups have encouraged more awareness of specialized audiences. One of the most overlooked of those specialized audiences is the hearing impaired. President Jimmy Carter has expressed an interest in increasing the quality of interpreting services for deaf people, both on and off television. Congress has enacted a bill providing funds for training interpreters for the deaf.

Surveys revealed that at least 13.4 million people in the United States today have hearing impairments which are severe enough to prevent their enjoyment of radio broadcasting and the audio portion of television broadcasting. The Federal Communications Commission has made an effort to point out the special needs of this segment of the population and bring it to the attention of broadcasters. The Commission has suggested that television broadcasters use "as much visual information as possible" to enable the hearing impaired population to obtain emergency information from television.

Following the 1975 Report and Order requiring the visual captioning of emergency messages to alert deaf and hearing impaired viewers of disasters and other emergencies, stations developed a variety of prerecorded messages or slides to warn their viewers.

With the growing awareness of the importance of serving a hearing impaired audience, more attention will be given to that audience. Closed captioning, a system by which a decoder is used to make captions

visible on the screen, has been developed and is being made available to hearing impaired viewers. The expense of the captioning process (approximately \$2,000 a program) makes it an unrealistic approach for local programming efforts. The use of an interpreter for television in those situations is a more reasonable use of resources. A television interpreter is an individual who presents the audio portion of a program through sign language and lip movement so it can be understood by a deaf audience.

In an educational setting, television interpreting has become an integral part of the instructional programs of schools for the deaf. Additionally, public school systems have found the use of television interpreting helpful in complying with Federal Law 94-142, the Act providing for the mainstreaming of handicapped students.

An informal mail survey conducted by the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in March 1979, indicated that interpreters for television might be utilized more frequently if production guidelines and suggestions were available for use by commercial, public and educational broadcast facilities. To that end, this manual was designed to fulfill the requirements your facility might have in the area of interpreting for television. Interpreters will also find this manual useful in preparing for the experience. The material is based on conversations with interpreters for television, broadcast facilities that utilize those interpreters and the experience NTID has had in over four years of providing television interpreting for a deaf audience. Though these suggestions have been tested with students at NTID and have received widespread approval, audiences differ and preferences change.

II HOW TO FIND A QUALIFIED INTERPRETER

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) was established in 1964 to provide certification and to disseminate information for and about interpreting. RID has local chapters in 46 states, the District of Columbia, the trust territory of Guam and two chapters in Canada.

RID has developed a National Certification Program to identify highly qualified interpreters to ensure the best interpreting services possible. The National Chapter in Washington, D.C. can be contacted for assistance in locating a qualified interpreter for television in your area.

The pay scale for television interpreting may differ from area to area, and be a function of an interpreter's skill level. The local RID chapter may also offer specific advice in determining the scale for your interpreting needs. (If there is any problem locating an RID chapter, contact a local speech and hearing center or school for the deaf for assistance.)

III PROGRAM SELECTION FOR INTERPRETING

Locating an interpreter for television does not guarantee success. The choice of the program to be interpreted will play a large role in the understanding of its content by the hearing impaired viewing audience. The following are some program types that will benefit by interpreting:

A. Special Events and Emergencies

A generally accepted and now legislated practice is to visually caption emergency messages pertaining to disasters, severe weather bulletins and the like. Special events such as Presidential addresses are usually immediate, allowing no time for captioning, and are therefore prime candidates for interpreting.

Special events broadcasts are fast-paced and often include question and answer situations. Due to the pace and visual placement, (mostly "talking heads") more than one interpreter might be used so one can relieve the other, particularly if the event is scheduled to run over a half hour. The interpreter should be inserted in such a way as to make the signs readable while trying to avoid covering the mouth of the person who is speaking. (See Section VI, Production Considerations.)

B. News

Many broadcast facilities are engaged in interpreting local news, or providing interpreted national and/or local news summaries. Television interpreters agree that news shows are among the most difficult to interpret because of the immediacy of the effort and the pace of the program. It is best to devise a system for changing interpreters during such a fast-paced program.

Local efforts provide more flexibility and preparation time and it is helpful if the interpreter is involved in the final stages of production planning whenever possible.

C. Entertainment Programs

When choosing a program to be interpreted, two considerations come into play: audience preference and the interpretability of a specific program.

Surveys of deaf college students at NTID indicate that their program preferences match those of the U.S. television viewing population at large. Those programs that score high ratings nationally also find favor with a deaf audience. Sample groups, advisory boards and social clubs in the deaf community are often very helpful in providing information about program preference.

The interpretability of a program should be considered in order to assure the best quality of interpreting. Factors to consider include:

(1) program pace - if the dialogue pace of the program is fast, for example, like most news programs, it is very difficult for a deaf viewer to catch all of the verbal information and still have time to watch the other visual content. (2) number of characters on the screen at one time - the more characters the more difficult it is to distinguish the different speakers. (3) language level - programs that have complex vocabulary and sentence structure are sometimes difficult to interpret since the interpreter often has to rely on fingerspelling, that is, spelling out words on the hands letter by letter.

Some programs are more easily interpreted than others. Documentaries, police stories and highly visual and active shows are often produced in such a way that the video and audio messages reinforce one another. The pace, though visually fast, often uses well-paced dialogue. For example, there are often long pauses in the dialogue during chase scenes. Comedies dependent on word plays or idioms and variety shows and musical presentations are difficult to interpret, though comic episodes that depend on action, expression or sight gags can be interpreted very successfully. Selection is therefore very program specific.

These instances presuppose that the facility has little or no content control over a particular program. If the program being interpreted uses already existing materials, a series approach is encouraged. A program that continues for a number of broadcasts gives the television interpreter an opportunity to become familiar with the characters, plot and style of the program.

However, if the show is locally produced, many of those variables can be controlled. Suggestions for approaches to local broadcasts are given in a later section. (See Section V, Local Programming.)

D. Commercials

The buying power of 13.4 million consumers has now been acknowledged to the point where some companies are incorporating interpreters in their television advertisements. One word of caution, however. If a commercial has written copy on the screen that matches the audio portion of the message, the interpreter is not necessary and may even confuse a deaf viewer. The interpreter should be removed from the screen.

IV. TIPS FOR INTERPRETERS

When asked to interpret for television, the experience can sometimes be a bit overwhelming. It's hard to decide exactly who the audience is or what their level of understanding is at any given time. There is no eye contact and no immediate feedback from the audience. Lights, cameras and a cast of people are often powerful distractions. However, by observing some simple guidelines, the experience can be comfortable and successful.

The means by which the interpreter is inserted on the screen may differ from station to station. However, the interpreter can be of help to the television staff by demonstrating the size of the area on the screen needed in order to make the signs clear and readable. For example the sign for the word "forever" requires more space than most other signs. If there is a severe space limitation, the best procedure is to find a synonym or fingerspell the word. A word of caution, however. Fingerspelling will be difficult for the viewer to read given the space allocation on the screen so it should be kept to a bare minimum whenever possible.

In following on-screen action, body-shifting may be subtly and effectively used to demonstrate screen placement of the character speaking. The pace of the program will determine how much of this is possible without making the interpreter and the viewer dizzy.

The size and the clarity of the signs are very important. Keep positioning in mind, using space and directionality. Facial expression is one of the most important aspects of interpreting for television. Good expression can sometimes replace several signs.

Non-verbal sounds (doorbells, radios, telephones) are often important to a story's plot. By indicating that they exist and what they are, the interpreter will give a deaf viewer an idea of why the characters are reacting in a certain way. They should be identified if they are important to the program's content.

In the studio during a live production, the interpreter needs to be placed in an area away from the traffic a live production generates. If there is more than one studio, ask to be placed in the studio that is not the primary production area. If that is not possible, try to arrange for one little corner with a view of the production area. The interpreter should be provided with a monitor placed next to or just below the camera and an audio feed which is adjusted to a comfortable level or an earplug so that the audio can be easily understood.

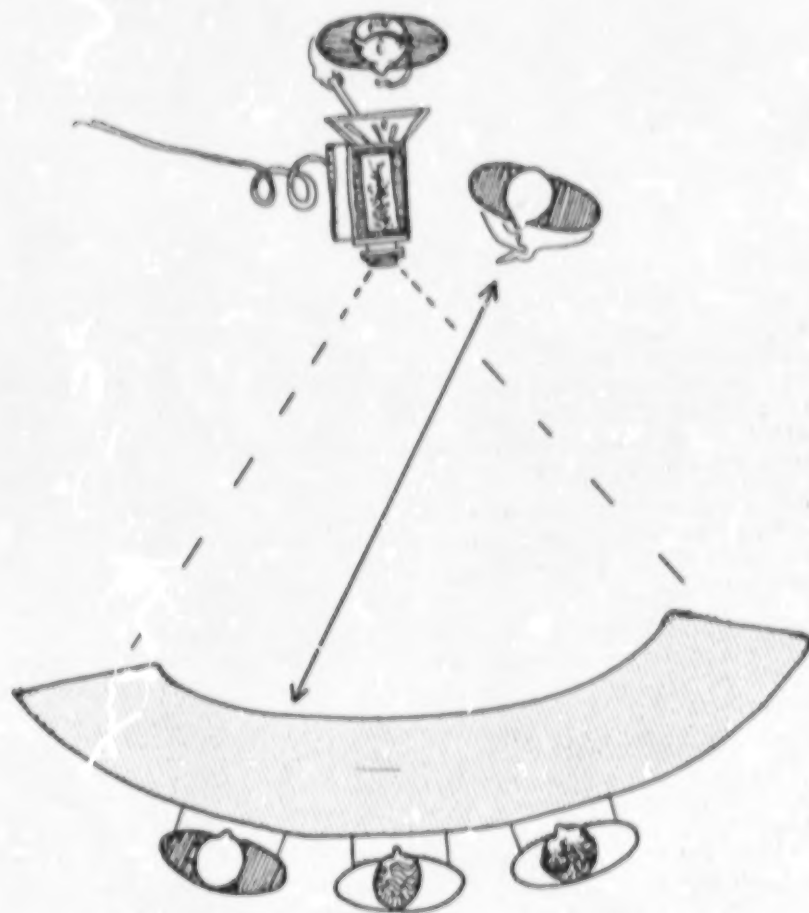
There may be times during the course of a program when there is a long silence or a self-explanatory graphic on the screen. Arrange with the station personnel to be removed from the screen at that time. That decision is obviously much easier when interpreting a taped broadcast, or when the production is being done locally. If that is the case, make arrangements to see the script or view the taped portion ahead of time. The "no surprises" approach is the most reassuring way to interpret for television.

Appearance and comfort go hand in hand. A backless stool is the choice for most television interpreters. Dress comfortably in simple, non-distracting clothes. Black or white are the most camera-offending colors.

If you are interpreting a local programming effort, try to be included in as much of the final planning as possible. Particularly in the public affairs area, accuracy of signs for legal and technical descriptions is important. The program producer will be willing to explain the scope and purpose of the program. In choosing a sign, make certain it won't appear to have a different meaning from the word intended in the script. Legally, the final burden for correct signing rests with the interpreter. Legal action (libel, etc.) can result against the managers of a facility with the interpreter being charged as co-defendant. For example, in signing "alleged," use "apparent" or "possible" with a facial expression of doubt. An alcoholic is not necessarily a "drunk person;" it could be signed "drinking sickness."

Continuing evaluation of an interpreter's on-air appearance and performance should be a primary consideration. Station personnel can provide feedback on appearance. Members of the deaf community may be consulted for insight into the clarity and understandability of signs. Questions can also be expected from hearing viewers who may be seeing an interpreter for the first time. Keep a phone number handy for those viewers who are interested in learning more about sign language.

The other situation that might be encountered during a television interpreting stint is that of reverse interpreting for a deaf guest. If that is the case, experience has shown no need for the reverse interpreter to be present on the set or seen on-camera. Positioning off-camera but in line of sight of the person who needs reversing is most appropriate.



Communication is the key - with the broadcast facility and the audience. Other portions of this manual should assist the television interpreter in being prepared, particularly the section under "Production Considerations" which outlines acceptable television make-up and clothing.

V LOCAL PROGRAMMING

A. Style of Copy

When using a television interpreter in a local programming effort, there are certain basic principles which make programs more effective with hearing impaired viewers and more appealing to a general audience.

Most of these considerations are consistent with commonly accepted journalistic style, and all are designed to help the viewer understand a program.

1. *Keep your sentences brief.* Protracted sentences are cumbersome for the announcer, the interpreter and the audience, both hearing and deaf.

2. *Avoid strings of adjectives.* In a phrase such as, "the bright orange and yellow striped oblong-shaped balloon," the interpreter may have to wait for the noun "balloon" before ever signing the modifiers. If it takes that long to get to the noun, it may throw the interpreter behind.

3. *Avoid extended appositives and dependent clauses.* "Blair, a fugitive from the House of Correction, where he had been serving a six-month term for exhibitionism..." By the time the narrator and the interpreter reach the main clause, the audience has forgotten who the antecedent is.

4. *Avoid redundancy.* "Since becoming President, Gerald Ford has begun adding his own personal touches to the administration he inherited from former President Richard Nixon. There are reports that he may begin making some changes in

his administration, and speculation is that some cabinet appointments may come as early as November." In English, the redundancy is not as annoying as it is in sign language. But since the first sentence and the first clause of the second sentence say the same thing, the interpretations in sign language are almost identical.

5. *Avoid passive voice.* It is sometimes difficult to convey passive voice in sign language. A sentence such as, "Rockefeller was appointed Vice President by President Ford," must be transposed to read, "President Ford appointed Rockefeller as Vice President." If the sentence is not transposed, the impression given is that Rockefeller appointed Ford.

6. *Slow down or pause on long names.*

These names, whether places or people, usually must be fingerspelled rather than signed and that takes more time.

B. Previewing Pretaped Segments

The interpreter's familiarity with a particular content area of a program should be a primary goal. If the program contains pre-taped material, provide the interpreter with a verbatim script or an audio or video tape of the segment well in advance of the program's air date.

C. Interpreter's Placement in Studio

Interpreting requires concentration. If a broadcast facility has more than one studio, arrange for the interpreter to be placed in the area not used for the production. If that is not possible, position the interpreter out of the mainstream of cameras and crew, off-set and with some means of clearly receiving the audio and video portions of the program.

D. Reverse Interpreting

A reverse interpreter gives the signed or spoken message of a deaf person in spoken English for the benefit of the hearing audience. If your facility has a deaf guest requiring the assistance of a reverse interpreter, it is not necessary to include the interpreter on-set or on camera. Position the

reverse interpreter in direct eye contact with the deaf guest but out of camera range. The reverse interpreter should have a microphone. That is not always the case with a deaf guest. Some deaf people prefer not to use their voices at all and others are not easily understood so a microphone is not necessary.

VI PRODUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

A. Lighting

The studio backdrop should be solid and dark for easier readability of the interpreter's signs. Standard lighting techniques can then be utilized with good success, but careful attention should be paid to the back light for separation. It can be moved more to the side for a 3-D effect.

B. Camera Placement, Monitor Placement and Audio Level

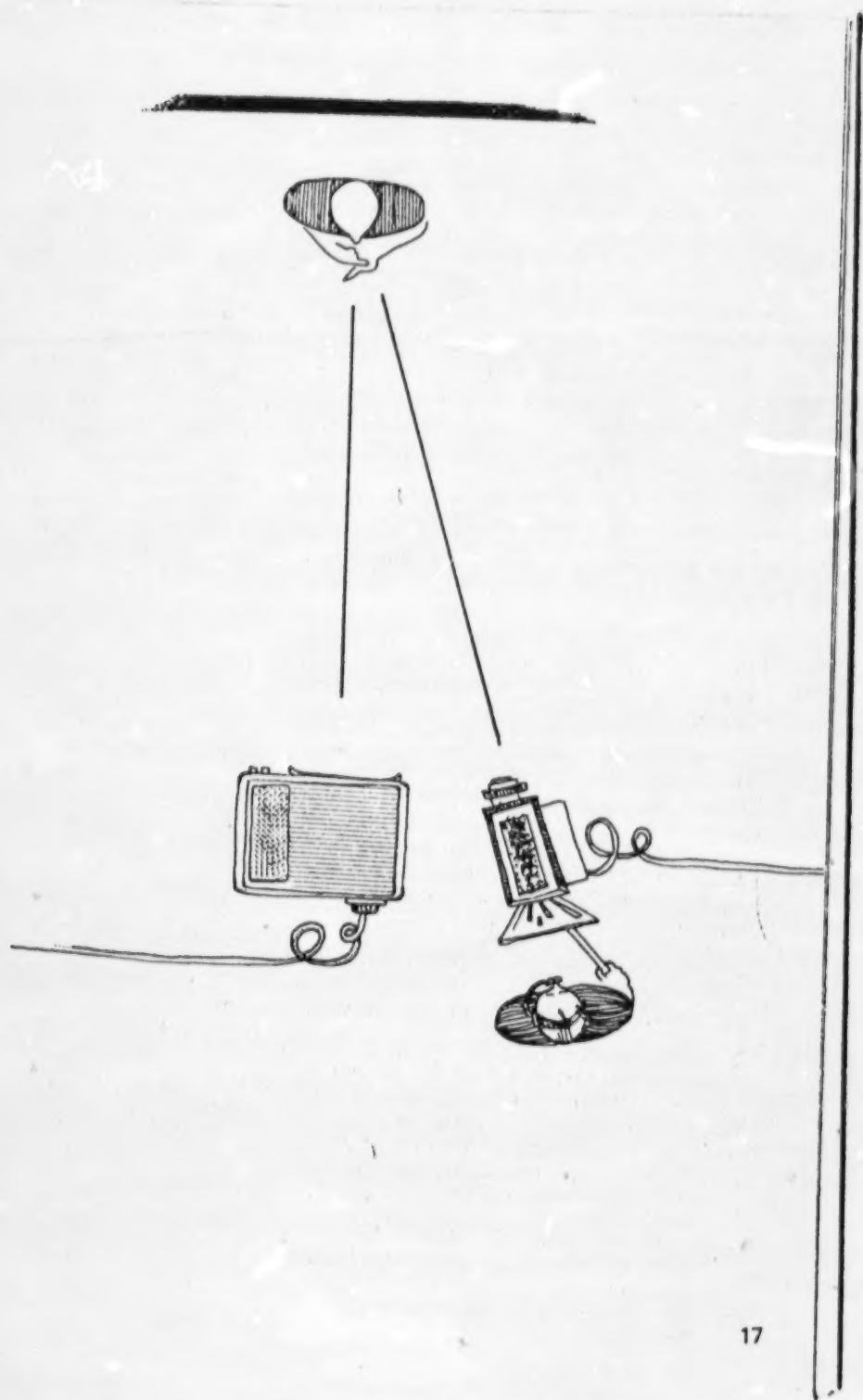
Studies at NTID have shown a preference for television interpreters to be placed at a fifteen degree angle to the camera so that both the interpreter's eyes are visible but the interpreter is not staring directly into the camera. This angle tends to enhance the 3-D effect.

The viewers also prefer that the interpreter's eyes face the center of the screen. The monitor should be placed near the camera so that such an effect can be achieved. Studio personnel should be sure the interpreter is receiving all necessary audio and video for programs at a comfortable level.

C. Make-up and Dress

Clothing and make-up should be of a non-distracting nature. For women, the following guidelines are suggested:

1. Make-up of true skin colors should be used: cream, ivory, olive, tan. Orange colors distort. The make-up should be well-blended especially around the corners of the eyes. All exposed areas should be covered with make-up including hands. (If not treated, the hands will provide too strong a contrast.)



2. Rouge is necessary to prevent a pale monotone. Brownish tones are recommended.
3. Lipstick should be light, clear red in shade.
4. Eye shadow in greys and browns aide in preventing eye sockets from appearing red. Blend carefully with foundation to prevent strong edges.
5. Use an erase stick for blemishes and contouring under basic make-up.

For Men:

1. Powder in a skin-tone should reduce shine.
2. Cover all exposed areas, including ears.
3. Use grey or brown eye shadow to prevent red looking sockets.
4. Shave, if necessary, close to air-time.

Both men and women should wear their hair back from their faces to avoid distracting shadows.

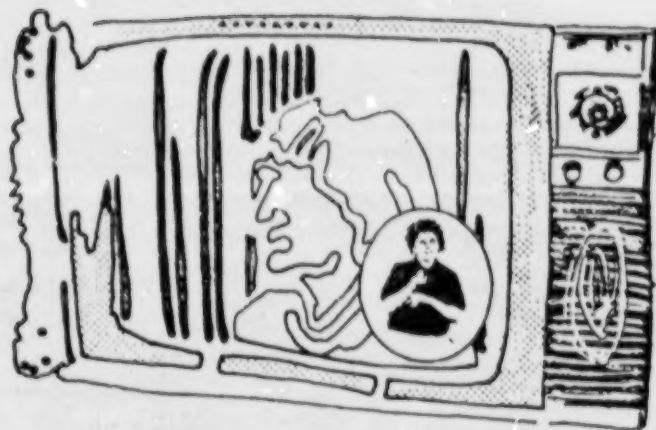
Clothing should not be distracting either. Basic television guidelines as to color and patterns apply (no black or white or loudly patterned clothing). In addition, consider the background or set colors in a given production. The interpreter's clothing should contrast with those colors so the interpreter does not get lost in the background.

Jewelry should be kept to a bare minimum or not worn at all. Any reflective or distracting surfaces will affect the readability of the signs.

2. Interpreter Placement on the Screen

The NTID survey of broadcast facilities favored placing the interpreter at the lower right hand corner of the screen in an oval insert. This supports audience preference studies with deaf college students at NTID.

3. Size and shape. The size of the insert should be as large as possible so that the interpreter's hands can be clearly seen without severely blocking the program video.



2. *Insertion and removal from screen.* As previously discussed, deaf viewers are entitled to and interested in all the information television provides. There are some instances, however, when the interpreter is not necessary to explain a portion of a program's content. If there is a long silence or instrumental or unrelated music with visuals or a self-explanatory graphic representation on the screen, the interpreter may be excess baggage or actually interfere with comprehension and should be removed. In inserting or removing the interpreter a quick fade or punching from that source appear to be the least jarring methods to deaf viewers.

This manual of production guidelines is in part the result of an informal mail survey conducted in Spring 1979. The NTID Instructional Television Department surveyed commercial and public television stations, schools for the deaf, and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. Of the nearly 600 responses, over half said they were now utilizing an interpreter for television or had plans for doing so in the future. The survey also pointed out that most programs that are presently being interpreted were news and public affairs presentations, followed by special events coverage and instructional programs. Many facilities interpreted for television on a regular schedule but the majority of respondents said they selected programs for specific content at irregular intervals. NTID was pleased to see the growing commitment to including the hearing impaired audience in a facility's regular programming schedule. We hope you found the manual helpful. The Instructional Television Department would be happy to share the complete survey results upon request.